



# VOICE OF THE BABY IN PRACTICE

Resources to guide the practical application of  
**The Voice of the Baby: A Reflective Guide for the Arts.**



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# INTRODUCTION

## Foreword by Rhona Matheson

Welcome to the Starcatchers **Voice of the Baby In Practice** Resource. This resource has been inspired by research that Starcatchers commissioned in response to increasing curiosity from across Arts, Health, Early Learning and Childcare and Voluntary sectors about how to consider the 'voice' of our youngest children in consultation and participation activities and our belief that the arts could be a wonderful tool to support this.



The research undertaken by Dr Rachel Drury from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Dr Cara Blaisdell from Queen Margaret University, and research assistant Claire Ruckert, resulted in the creation of the **Starcatchers Voice of the Baby: A Reflective Guide for the Arts**, which outlines five areas for consideration when using rights-based creative approaches with babies and very young children. **The Voice of the Baby In Practice Resource** sits alongside **the Reflective Guide** to help put this work into practice and we hope you will find these tools helpful in your work with babies, young children and their parents and carers.

Why is this needed?

Babies and young children, those from birth – 3 years are a group who are consistently overlooked in terms of children's rights. Their lack of verbal language, perceptions about their capabilities and their reliance on the adults makes it much harder for them to access their rights than older children and young people. What we do know, however, is that babies and young children use a myriad of ways to communicate with those around them, sharing their views and their experience of the world.

With the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law in Scotland, it has never been more important for us to ensure that babies, those from birth – 3 years, are supported to have their rights realised. A key aspect is that this is not solely focused on the protection and provision rights within the UNCRC but also the participation rights that babies are entitled to. Being included and heard in decisions that are made about their lives is essential, but it is also complex. We know that professionals across sectors are seeking to engage with, and include the views of, babies and young children but that they need support and tools to do this effectively.

The Starcatchers Approach

Putting the needs and 'voice' of babies and young children has been at the heart of Starcatchers' work since our pilot project in 2006. Since then, we have evolved our rights-based approach informed by the babies and young children we have connected with, and by our increased understanding of children's rights. Where initially our focus was on Article 31 and realising the rights of babies and very young children to engage with and participate in the arts and cultural life, we know that the arts can be a vehicle for babies and very young children to experience the breadth and depth of the rights held within the UNCRC. This includes being able to express views and feelings about matters that affect them and that these views can be taken into account by decision-makers.

The **Voice of the Baby Reflective Guide** and the **In Practice Resource** is only a small step in the consideration of the 'voice' of babies and very young children in Scotland. It is, however, an exciting step towards enabling increased visibility of babies and their inclusion in discussions regarding their rights.



# WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

This resource is for practitioners across sectors who wish to facilitate rights-based practice with babies and young children (notionally from birth to three) through participatory arts experiences.

Starcatchers artists are highly skilled in their practice. Although the examples in this resource are from an arts context, it is important to recognise that participatory arts experiences can be used across education, health and social care settings and beyond.

We have chosen to use the word “artist” throughout this resource to refer to the person facilitating a participatory arts experience. (see also: Glossary, page 20)

Whatever sector you work in, this resource is designed to inspire your “inner artist” and support you to use rights-based approaches to the arts within your practice.

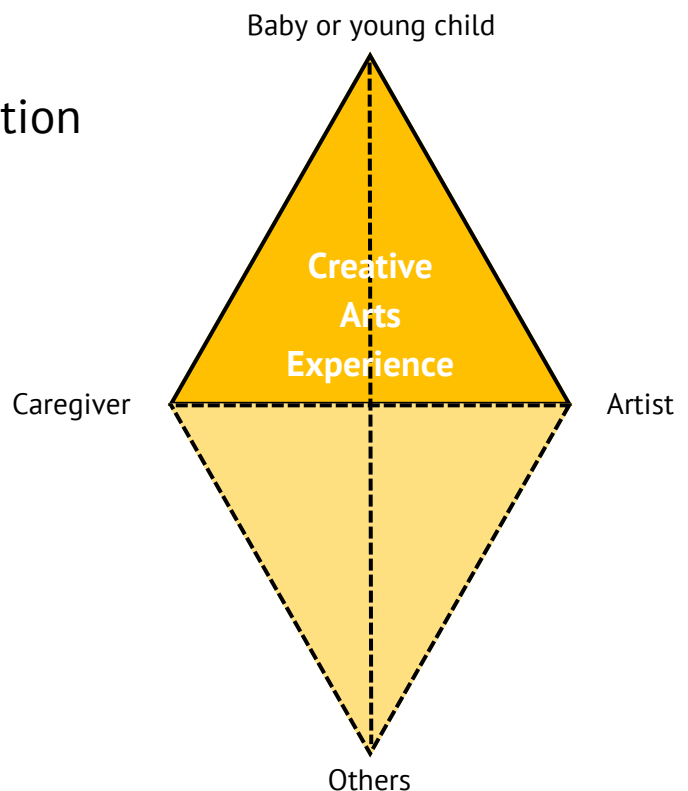
## Thinking like a Starcatchers Artist

- Tap into your own playfulness
- Realise the power of parallel play and modelling behaviour
- Unhurried, relaxed feeling to sessions
- A genuine affection for babies and their families
- Curate “yes spaces” and experiences for babies to explore and create
- Use your understanding of child development
- Be curious about what genuinely engages the babies you work with

# The Kite Model:

## Social Construction of Participation

One thing that sets this age group apart from others is that babies and young children are accompanied by a caregiver(s) to help them access and participate in a creative arts experience. As such, the significant adults in their lives become an integral part both of their participation experience and of their ‘voice’ at this stage.



We offer our ‘Kite’ model to help consider all the ‘in the moment’ reciprocal interactions between those involved when working with babies and young children to enable them to participate fully.

# STARCATCHERS ENGAGEMENT SIGNALS

These engagement signals were developed with researchers from the University of Exeter and the University of Strathclyde, across our initial pilot phases with children from birth to 5 years. The Engagement Signals have been used ever since to inform our understanding of how babies and young children engage in the arts. They are a key way for Starcatchers' artists to tune into what babies value and enjoy, and we know that other professionals have found them to be a useful tool to support early years practice.

## Attuned

When a baby or child is intensely watching and cued in to what is going on. This includes their eyes tracking or focusing on whatever, or whoever, they're attuned to. This doesn't necessarily mean eye contact - they may watch and follow your hands, or an object you're holding.

Intense attention for a period of time, including ignoring any distractions. This could be engaging in an activity physically, or watching intensely (tying into attuned) for an extended period of time. There is no set time for engagement to be "extended"; you know the children you work with and will be able to sense what has grabbed their attention for longer than usual.

## Absorbed

## Mirroring

Watching and reciprocating through repeating or copying. This could be physically copying or adapting your movements, or vocally copying the sounds or noises that you make.. They also may not copy people - if they see a character or object spin, they might try spinning too.

Signs of responding positively can include positive or open body language - smiling, nodding, reaching. They may also indicate they are following what's going on by responding with suggestions or questions. It can also include social referencing - which is the process whereby babies or young children look at other's facial expressions to understand how they are feeling. For example, a wee one handed a paintbrush may look at a key worker for confirmation before playing with it.

## Responsive

## Interactive

Physically responding to someone else. This is similar to Responsive but it's a 2-way exchange with another person. They are watching the other person and engaging with their actions or movements. For example, clapping in time with someone else or taking it in turns to mark-make together.

Provoking action in others through their own physical response or vocalisation. For example, making a noise during a song that prompts the singer to incorporate it into the song, or making a suggestion for what should happen next in a story.

## Instigative

## Experimental

Taking individual action with materials or props. This will be self-led investigation, where they will be exploring "what happens if...". For example playing with an instrument that's been brought out during singing or music.

## ABOUT THE VOICE OF THE BABY: A REFLECTIVE GUIDE FOR THE ARTS

The **Voice of the Baby: A Reflective Guide for the Arts** outlines five areas to consider in relation to rights-based approaches to the arts, which have shaped this resource.

- In each section, you'll find a video that will get you thinking about a different area of your practice.
- You'll also find reflections from Starcatchers artists and early years practitioners that help illustrate what these rights-based approaches to the arts look like in the real world. We've changed the names of participants in these practice examples.

It's important to remember that all areas of the **Reflective Guide** intersect with one another – an example of practice might sit within the section about Navigating Identity, but may also address Curating the Space or Making Time. Where we can, we've highlighted these connections.

### Helpful Links

[Reflective Guide for the Arts](#)



[Phase Two Summary Research Report](#)



[Starcatchers Engagement Signals](#)



[Starcatchers Wee Inspirations](#)



[Starcatchers Artist Biographies](#)



### Defining the Voice of the Baby

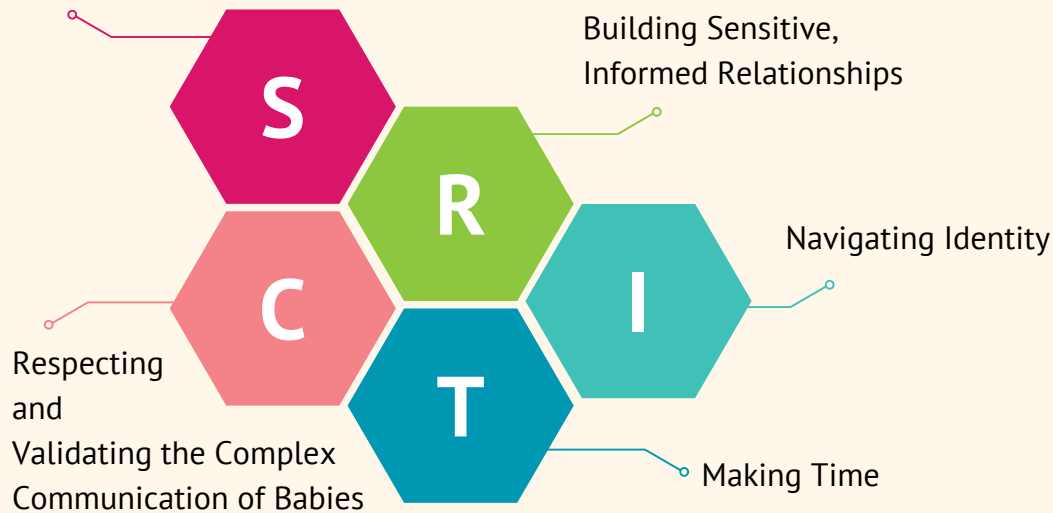
**Voice of the Baby:** refers to a wide range of communications including, but not limited to, verbal voice (spoken word or otherwise), non-verbal communications like movement, expression, action, sound, gestures, and silences. The term 'voice of the baby' is used in this report and project, while acknowledging the limitations of 'voice' as a shorthand for very complex communication and processes of interpretation.

**What we mean by "baby":** the research focused on pre- and/or non-verbal young children (broadly in the birth to three range) who may not (yet) communicate through the spoken word.

**OUR DECISION TO USE THE WORD 'BABY' IS A DELIBERATE RESPONSE TO BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN BEING HISTORICALLY OVERLOOKED WITHIN CHILDREN'S RIGHTS POLICY AND PRACTICE.**

# THE 5 AREAS

Curating the Space



## How to use this guide

- We have created a series of videos to accompany each area, and to offer real-life examples of the Reflective Guide in action. Videos can be accessed via a QR code. The series includes an Introductory video, an Engagement Signals video, and one video for each area of the Reflective Guide.
- We recommend that you refer to the Helpful Links listed on page 2 as you work your way through this resource.
- Look out for the icons below throughout the document. They are a key to the content in this resource, indicating the various sections that will make up the guide to each area.
- We will highlight connections between the areas under the heading 'Bringing it All Together'. We will provide page numbers where you will find references to an area in other sections.

Scan the code below to access the **Voice of the Baby In Practice** video series:



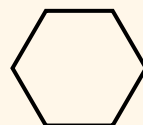
Each section will include highlights from the Phase 2 Summary Report.



Starcatchers will share tips and points in each section.



Here you will find the video number for each section.



A colour key will show where a Case Study is relevant to more than one area (shown above).



Quotes from Hailesland Early Years Centre (ELC) and Nurture Nursery.



Case Studies and reflections by Starcatchers' Artists.

# 1. CURATING THE SPACE

## Creating permission for play and creativity

Whether your space is purpose built or a community space that is being borrowed for the duration of your work, or whether it is one you regularly use or not, the need to curate it will still be an important factor in creating a space where babies can be creative, engage in meaningful participation and demonstrate their influence.

### Reflective Questions:

1. How does the space influence the creative arts experience?
2. How does the creative arts experience influence the space?
3. How do you want the space to feel, sound, or look like?
4. How will the space and the resources help to create permission for play and creativity for babies (and their adults)?
5. How does the space encourage children's communication with you and others as they move through it?

## The Only Rule - There Are No Rules

There can be so many barriers for adults to join in creative experiences, first and foremost the space needs to be safe and accessible for babies and young children – if we're planning on wee ones and their adults to be on the floor together then it needs to be clean and comfortable. When we're delivering in a "borrowed" space we need to think about whether we're going to be interrupted, what the distractions might be – for a high quality experience we need to do everything we can to "protect" the experience and minimise distractions as much as possible. I use a lot of open ended resources, so there's no "wrong" way to play. I also use some familiar objects or materials like hula hoops – I try and choose things that are robust or easily replaced, so no-one spends the session worrying about things being broken or misused. Where possible, everything should be at the wee ones' level so they can communicate what they're most interested in – that could be by walking or crawling there, pointing or gazing. Adults can be a key part of wee ones communicating what parts of the space they're interested in – sometimes it's about carrying them where they want to go, or moving with them so they feel secure to explore the space the way they want to. The experiences I share don't need a lot of instructions or "rules" – everything is designed to be inclusive, and the emphasis is on exploring and playing rather than any kind of skill level. This way, the adults have the space and time to tune into their wee ones rather than worrying about achieving a certain outcome. **Amy Hall-Gibson**

This area relates to the nature of the space itself, and the materials and experiences curated within it.



Video #2



*Because the spaces were so carefully curated to facilitate play and creativity, the physical environment often acted as the main driver of children's voice as they moved around the space (or indicated non-verbally that they wanted to be moved).*

*The spaces 'flipped' the usual hierarchies between adults and young children, so that children themselves were the main deciders about what they would engage with, and how.*

*We all noticed an unhurried, relaxed feeling to the sessions, and a feeling of permission—a 'yes space'—for children to explore and create.*



*If you're using a space that's very familiar and usually fulfills another purpose, curating the space is an important part of redefining that space as an arts experience.*



## Baby Safe and Beautiful



By making a space beautiful, right from the start you're sending a clear message that babies' play and creativity is important. People want to be in beautiful spaces, it makes them feel welcomed and special. Spaces that are beautiful and interesting encourage communication – in the “LOVE” session I created a soft area with different textures, anything I could find in shades of pink and red, lots of satin, fur, directional sequins – everyone wanted to be in the space, and explore, and share the textures with each other. Choosing a colour scheme makes the experience feel considered, it looks good but doesn't always need loads of thought, sometimes it can just be a case of “what's baby safe and yellow”. If you can, cut down on the visual noise – have a think about what's on the ceiling and the walls. Having a space that's a blank slate means even simple things can feel really important/ special/ considered/ purposeful, you can see them in a new light. It can be as simple as draping some fabric – find some way to define or redefine the space and edit out what you don't need to be paying attention to. Or move outside – natural spaces automatically gives you a different backdrop. I quite like synthetic colours that look great in contrast to natural colours, they really contrast and pop. Lighting makes a massive difference to a space – have a think about what lights don't need to be on (particularly strip lighting!). Instead of white, cold lighting, think about golden/warm lighting, or different colours – fairy lights, lamps, torches, anything LED will stay cool to the touch. Overhead projectors used to be in every cupboard, they're a great way to play with shadows, transparent colours etc. **Katy Wilson**

R



*The Baby Studio experience was at the child's level and inviting. The way the room was laid out was an invitation to play. Adults within the room took the children's lead, mimicking their sounds and behaviours. Children were supported by adults who were attuned to their cues and who responded to them encouraging their participation. **Hailesland ELC***

## Breaking the Beauty



I want the space to feel exciting and enticing – by having multiple offers, you can create a space that says EXPLORE! When I'm choosing the components I want in the space, some will be obvious and familiar to give a sense of ease: books and cosy corners can be a great addition to a space where adults know what's expected of them. I use a lot of tactile, sensory offers, low down and accessible, lots of loose parts that are great for schema play, so there's quite a lot for mobile babies to be able to explore independently. But I also explore more abstract ideas that might only come to life when an artist interacts with it – something like a giant ball of wool, can be very much about an artist connecting with a baby and their adult. Spaces can be set up beautifully, and as an artist I can support the idea of unravelling that space, breaking the beauty. It's exciting to have a really cool set up that babies get to explore in their own way – and an artist being a part of deconstructing that space is an important part of making a “yes” space. **Kerry Cleland**



*The spaces within the nursery are open and bright. The space is neutral and has clear walls which allow the children to use their own imagination to create different worlds within it. Trusted adults promote choice and encourage imagination in the spaces. All resources are easily accessible. **Nurture Nursery.***

### **Bringing it All Together**

You will find connections to **Space** in the following case studies:

Paint Salad, Yes to the Mess: **Page 10**  
Welcome to the Baby Zone: **Page 13**  
Fresh Snow: **Page 15**

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## 2. BUILDING SENSITIVE, INFORMED RELATIONSHIPS

Non-judgemental, warm, affectionate interpersonal interactions

From the research, we know an arts context allows for an approach that is tangibly different from other 'services' that babies and adults encounter, such as education, healthcare etc. As such, the relationships with babies and adults are crucial in facilitating participation.

### Reflective Questions:

1. How does your approach encourage the building of relationships within the space
2. How does the arts experience you have created facilitate the process of building relationships for everyone in the space?
3. How might relationships differ in the space?
4. How do the relationships inform the arts experience?

### Arts Spark!



Often my role is to play, to listen and connect to the child and go on that journey with their baby, there will be moments of connecting with both baby and adult - then pass the play baton on to their adult.

The adult sees their baby being listened to, their choices being validated, and being able to have a non-verbal conversation/really connecting with their wee one, that's where the trust begins to build. Some wee ones get stuck straight in, some would rather hang back and observe, and others will come in with their own agenda - all the valid ways of engaging, but they can affect how their adults can engage with others.

It's a balance between giving people space to engage the way they want to, and making sure anyone on the periphery have several "ways in" throughout the session - this could be as simple as offering them a new object, or chatting to them about how their wee one is doing. **Kerry Cleland**

C

This area relates to an affectionate 'hosting' approach to babies, young children and families, warm relationships, and navigating tensions around expectations



Video #3



*Crucially, the hosting did not feel like a warmup to a more formal intervention or service. In fact, the artists were clear that they did not want the spaces to be 'teachery'--they do not tell families what to do or control what the sessions are for, other than creative play. Perhaps for this reason, there seemed to be genuinely warm relationships between the artists, children and families, and many seemed to know each other well". Pg 9, Phase Two Report*



The 'Kite' model can be useful for understanding how relationships may look different within arts experiences. When building arts experiences into other services, think about how introducing aspects of this approach may shift relationship dynamics.

## You're Silly, I'm Silly, Everyone is Silly!



I found modelling silliness to be the best way – everyone else then sees they have “permission” to be silly too. If a wee one engages in a way that’s different from what adults might expect, I’ll mirror that behaviour to show it’s valid and that it’s valued – if they stick their whole hand in the paint then I will too. It’s a powerful way to build those relationships, so people can trust when I say there’s lots of different ways to engage. **Kirsty Pennycook**

C

## Paint Salad



I want to approach everyone as equals – parents are experts in their own babies, wee ones are experts in their own creativity, I’m there to facilitate tapping into their own exploration. For me, it’s about being that calm, positive influence in the space: reassuring adults and celebrating what wee ones do, celebrating individuality – its about creative experiences where there’s no one way to interact. Introducing experiences you can’t really be good or bad at (like playing with paint in salad spinners, or marbling) creates a YES zone and builds opportunities to highlight people’s strengths to them.

**Katy Wilson**

S

## Yes to the Mess!



It’s important to set a tone where people feel respected and valued, people need to feel safe. My work can involve a lot of sensory play, so wee ones can explore different textures, smells and sights – I make it really clear this is a space where it’s OK to make a mess. Especially at the start, it can be useful to have parts of the session where you “need” another adult, it helps parents or carers to get involved if they’re feeling a bit unsure – even something as simple as holding some guttering steady so wee ones can roll objects down it. Once you’ve known those adults for a while you can gently “push” them to be more creative, to be more messy, to try things they’d never have attempted in week one or two. But it starts with them feeling safe. **Kirstin Georgia Abraham**

S



*Children, parents and staff all felt relaxed to explore both the Baby Studio and room experience as they had adults with them who they knew. Parents/ carers were included in the studio experience, and this promoted children’s participation as they were there living the experience alongside their care giver. Some of our children showed initial uncertainty due to this being a new space, but due to parents and staff being in the environment they were able to access experiences with support from care giver. The role of the adults was to scaffold the child’s learning ensuring they could connect to the opportunities and then they took the lead from the child. **Hailesland ELC.***

### **Bringing it All Together**

You will find connections to **Relationships** in the following case studies:

Baby Safe and Beautiful: **Page 7**  
Here, There, Everywhere: **Page 10**  
Pyjama Day : **Page 11**  
A Visit to Baby Island: **Page 12**  
For the Love of Cars: **Page 15**

# 3. NAVIGATING IDENTITY

## Of yourself as the artist, the space, and the people within it

We encourage you to think about identity in a variety of ways: for example, your own identity in the space, the identity of others in the space, and also the identity of the space itself. Often, we have multiple identities that are in play at any given time.

This area relates to questions about gender stereotypes, supporting the diverse identities of babies and families, maintaining the space for babies, and artists helping with care routines.

### Reflective Questions:

1. What role(s) do you occupy within the space, and in any given activity? What roles do others play?
2. How does your role, and the role of others, influence the space and the people within it?
3. How do you maintain the integrity of identity of the space? (for example, when challenged by older children being present)
4. How might the arts experience create a sense of belonging that support babies' diverse identities? Do you notice that in-groups or out-groups are forming in your sessions?



Video #4



Another aspect of identity that arose was around gender stereotyping. Children are entitled to all the rights in the UNCR, without discrimination of any kind (Article 2). Gender stereotypes and other discriminatory attitudes can hinder the right to be heard[4]. However, stereotypes are deep-rooted and common in Scottish society, like many others. One such stereotype made its way into the artistic space:

“There were tutus available for the adults to dress babies in. There was a very interesting comment from one adult when she put the tutu on her baby—she said ‘It’s a good job your dad isn’t here—he’d have said ‘get it off!’ This perhaps suggests that the artists provide a safe space for male babies to wear what might be considered ‘female’ clothes.”

Although the artists provided a safe space for babies and caregivers to ‘play’ with gender in this way, the stereotype was still brought in by the significant adult’s comment. We found this to be an important provocation for how artists and other practitioners might ensure babies and toddlers’ right to express their views about their play, in the face of entrenched and limiting stereotypes. Pg 13, 14.

## Here, There, Everywhere

I’m comfortable to be creative from the word go, I go into warm up mode and play in the space before everyone arrives so I have some ideas up my sleeve – it means I’m ready as soon as the session starts. It’s about setting everyday life aside and leaving everything else at the door so I can be present, ready and open to play.

Groups within groups can happen, as an artist/facilitator its about how we develop relationships with the adults, and how we balance the sessions. When we’re planning sessions we’re inspired by what the babies are interested in exploring AND what their parents or carers enjoy. Finding shared interests can pull together the group as a whole. By sharing a creative space together we’re breaking down barriers in communities. We have two Mums from different faiths who have lived across the hall from each other for 8 or 9 years, and had never spoken to each other – they’ve struck up a friendship through the group.

Going on days out can really help strengthen group identity too – visiting an art exhibition or going to see a performance away from our usual venue can shake up the usual group dynamics and encourage new friendships. Arts spaces can feel hard to access when you have a baby, and breaking down those barriers is an important part of helping parents and carers feel like the arts are “for them”. **Kerry Cleland**





## Pyjama Day



Parents have their own identity as they walk into the space, often it feels like it's important to keep up appearances. We encourage folk to wear older/messy clothes, but it's not as simple as just telling them not to wear their good clothes, there can be a fear of looking like you're not coping, like you're struggling. I do a lot of "we don't want to get paint on your trainers", I'll think about how we can protect clothes so no-one has to worry about them or their wee one taking part. Other times, Mums will apologise for them still being in their jammies and when I tell them it's absolutely fine, I mean it – I'm not here to judge.

I'd be interested to know whether families think of me as an artist when I'm making them a cup of tea or asking how their week has been – my role can change depending on the needs of the group. I have one parent with a physical disability, who asked if I could be there when she changes her child just in case she needed support – in the end she didn't need it, but it was important for her for me to be there. A creative space needs to be a safe space, one where people feel supported.

What I can do is bring that sense of freedom, to play and be silly – someone who's open to being silly. There was one wee girl who wanted to cover herself in paint, her parent was getting stressed, so I told her she could cover me in paint instead – the participants thought it was hilarious and couldn't believe I was up for it, but we were breaking a taboo, showing what was possible and exploring new ways of play. **Roz McAndrew**

R

C

## Granny Watson Pays a Visit



I'm a theatre performer and I've spent the last two years working as an early years assistant in a nursery. Granny Watson developed from the imaginative play within the setting I worked in – the children had built a bus and wanted different people to join them, and Granny Watson became a recurring character they would ask me to play.

I spoke to my early years colleagues about wearing a Granny Watson costume and "visiting" the setting in character – the idea was to use the character as a creative provocation. It was important to me that I was still able to carry out my role as an early years assistant, and by telling the children that Granny Watson was there to "help" for the day, I was still able to care for the children. The care took on a different quality – my movements were slower, and I asked lots of questions in my role as a "naïve adult" that gave the children the opportunity to be the experts in their setting, and in their play. **Sam Jameson**

C



When building arts experiences into other services, professionals may feel like they need to switch roles, or hold more than one role at once. This can be challenging if you're not used to identifying as creative or "arty". Making a deliberate decision to put on your "artist hat" for a set period of time and communicating this with colleagues can make all the difference.



*This was a new experience for our families, and since our time in the Baby Studio, two of our families have made connections with each other to empower one another. They have had different experiences in life, but were both able to see the positive impact for their child attending the creative session. This service being in the local community, promotes a sense of belonging for our families to revisit. **Hailesland ELC***

### **Bringing it All Together**

You will find connections to **Identity** in the following case studies:

The Only Rule, There Are No Rules:

**Page 6**

When Baby Takes the Lead: **Page 13**

# 4. RESPECTING AND VALIDATING

## The complex communication of babies

There is considerable skill involved in the creation of a genuine two-way interaction between artist and baby. Knowing when to initiate, knowing when to follow a baby's lead, knowing when to leave space, knowing when to fill space, and all of these without the ability to be able to fall back on spoken word.

The 'Voice of the Baby' refers to a wide range of communications including, but not limited to, verbal voice (semantic or otherwise), non-verbal communications like movement, expression, action, sound, gestures, and silences.

### Reflective Questions:

1. How does your creative offering allow babies to make choices and influence what comes next?
2. What does their influence look like? Is it evident in the moment, is it evident over time?
3. How are their choices validated in the experience?

## A Visit to Baby Island

We always want to fill the time we have together, but we need to know when to step back and give them space. It's like visiting an island, you need to take the time to learn how each baby communicates, what their language is. Sometimes it's about observing over a period of weeks; we can use the engagement signals to see what they're really into, and notice when they keep revisiting certain schemas. Really getting to know them also means you can spot new interests as they emerge – I'll keep an eye to see if those interests continue and how I can bring them into future sessions. It's about me being able to see the artistic and creative possibilities within what they're already interested in.

A wee one was banging on a hat box, so I turned it over to make it more like a drum, I'd follow her lead of what rhythm etc – whenever I stopped she'd pull my hand over, she was about 8 months old. Tried different rhythms with my nails etc. Stopping and pausing and waiting is important. About 5-10 minutes. The next week I brought some drums along, using gathering drum is a great size for babies being able to really feel the vibrations. **Roz McAndrew**

R

T

This area relates to artists tuning in, interpreting, and validating babies' verbal and non-verbal communication



Video #5



*...during one session, Abbie (around a year old) was fixated on a purple ukelele and had it with her for the entire session. "She was so interested in manipulating it, pulling the strings, banging on it, messing around with holding it, mouthing it, purposefully dropping it (it makes a great noise). [Artist] sat near her for a while doing quiet little things like quietly singing songs, gently tapping in rhythm when Abbie tapped on the ukulele, made a little person out of a leaf and made it sing a song...I got a sense of this as an enhancement or almost a parallel play that could offer something to Abbie but not taking over." This level of attunement and creation of a two-way offering between baby and artist takes a great deal of concentration. It also requires patience and delicate pacing of the interaction to leave a lot of time for moments to unfold. Pg11*



In Early Learning and Childcare, this is recognised as a key part of delivering high quality practice – you can see the parallels in Realising the Ambition: Being Me.

## Welcome to the Baby Zone



It takes time to really tune into how babies and non-verbal children communicate – you need to be genuinely excited about what they're interested in and what they want to share with you. It gives you a real buzz, tuning into them gets you into the imaginative play zone. One session, we introduced a new book, and a couple of the toddlers went over to my bag to get the book we usually start the session with – so of course, we took their feedback and swapped books! It's also important that babies get to choose whether they engage or not – access to spaces for quiet time can be an important part of that. We had a mum and baby have a wee lie down during one session – we thought that was them done, but after five or ten minutes the wee one was awake again and raring to go. That's just what they needed in that moment, and it was important they were able to make that choice.

**Conor O'Donnell and Laura Curran McGee**

## The Office - Baby Style!



There's also something about respecting different ways babies engage. E.g watching and being more cautious/at the periphery – adults usually worry about that more than wee ones do, but their engagement is just as valid. As a facilitator, it's about validating the different ways they feel comfortable engaging, ensuring all the adults in the room are on the same page, and making sure there are regular, sensitive offers to develop the way they engage as a session progresses. We planned a session around the idea of a Baby Office – we were thinking about how interested the babies were in phones, and how phone can be a great way to start pretend conversations and spark imaginative play. At one point, I was at the white board, talking to one of the babies about their end of year numbers and filing reports, which me and their Mum obviously found really funny. But as I was chatting I really tuned in to how the baby was responding, their facial expressions, leaving pauses to give them time to “answer”. They were laughing and pointing, making noises, and I'd build on each “reply” – it was important to me that they were genuinely enjoying themselves, and that we only kept going as long as the baby found it funny. **Kerry Cleland**



## When Baby Takes the Lead



In one family movement session, there was a baby a few months old, lying on her back and kicking – so I lay on my back and mirrored her movements as closely as I could. I could see her pause, and watch to see if I would keep copying her, and a massive smile spread across her face when she realised what was happening. The best bit was that some of the older, more mobile children noticed and they started mirroring the baby's movements too – and suddenly, there was a whole room of people following her choreography. It's such a powerful moment, when babies realise they can have an impact like that. **Amy Hall-Gibson**



*Although our children entered the same space, they did not all engage in the same experiences. They all explored different opportunities which interested them, actively making their own choices. Adults responded by taking lead from the child. Another example was F throwing the reel, he was able to repeat this over and over. The adults modelled 'peek a boo' and the child began to copy. This was an example of the adults being attuned to the child's interest.*  
**Hailesland ELC**

### **Bringing it All Together**

You will find connections to **Communication** in the following case studies:

Breaking the Beauty: **Page 7**

Arts Spark!: **Page 8**

You're Silly, I'm Silly, Everyone is Silly!: **Page 9**

Pyjama Day, Granny Watson: **Page 11**

Moments in Time: **Page 14**

# 5.MAKING TIME

## For young children to be heard

Time is an area that perhaps has the most obvious link to all the other areas in the Reflective Guide. We encourage you to think about all aspects of time from child development (the significance of 4 weeks in the life of a 4 month old baby, for example), the duration of the arts experience you are sharing with them that day, the duration of time over which you have worked with them, right down to the amount of time you leave for a child to be able to respond to a stimuli or initiate the next course of action.

This area relates to children's development and the period of time that artists work with them. For some artists, this might be over a number of weeks or months, for others, it might be for the duration of a performance.



Video #6

### Reflective Questions:

1. In what ways does time influence your approach?
2. How might time influence the participatory needs of the babies you are working with?
3. How does time interact with the other areas of the Reflective Guide?



...(one) way in which time played a role was in the timing and pacing of the sessions themselves, which offered babies the opportunity to warm up, explore different people, build relationships with others and act on them in their own time: "The older children seem to be more actively interested in playing with each other, though this takes time and only develops towards the end of the session. They seem to be more focused on their caregivers at the start."

Another aspect of time that became important was the longer-term consideration of babies' ideas and interests to influence future sessions. For example, one artist mentioned a baby being really interested in trains and planning a future session accordingly. Pg 12

## Moments in Time

If I was delivering in a nursery, I wouldn't plan to be there less than hour – it's about having the time to take a more relaxed approach rather than having to run through a tight schedule. I think wee ones need more time than you might think. Sometimes baby warms up quickly but the adult needs time to warm up – if the time is too short then it's just me playing with the baby, we don't have time to transition into the adult taking over the play.

For one-off sessions, it's important to make sure wee ones can see their influence in the moment, whether that's mirroring, or giving them opportunities to explore and make decisions about what interests them. I'd rather give two or three ideas the time they deserve and give babies space and time to respond and explore, rather than trying to cram as much in as possible.

If I'm working with babies regularly, we have more time to respond to their needs through planning new sessions, whether that's revisiting something they particularly enjoyed, adding in new experiences based on schemas they're exploring, and having the time to really get to know them and tune in into what they're communicating to us. **Kerry Cleland**



If you're using arts-based approaches as part of your role in another sector, you may want to think about the time you're able to dedicate to arts experiences in relation your wider practice.

C



## For the Love of Cars



In one family session there was a wee boy who wasn't engaging, he was upset he was there – his Mum was visibly distressed and worried about him. I made a point of chatting to them both, being explicit that there was no pressure to stay or go, and asking about the kinds of things he did enjoy: his Mum mentioned his love of cars. The next session, I made sure to bring along some cars and incorporated them into the the wider session – no-one else would have known they were specifically for this little boy, but they made a massive difference to his engagement and built my relationship with him and his Mum, as well as finding a way to help them join the rest of the group. By week four he felt secure enough to explore new creative experiences – it was amazing to see the transformation. **Amy Hall-Gibson**

R

## Fresh Snow



Babies need time to explore a creative experience, but it can also be about being able to start all over again and revisit the experience. Think about how satisfying it is to take those first steps in fresh snow. When I'm planning I think about how easily something can be reset, it shouldn't be a one shot opportunity. Particularly for babies who may take a while to warm up and get involved, or even as a way to keep engagement going - sometimes it's important to be able to bring out new paper, offer a clean slate, make something beautiful again. **Katy Wilson**

S



*There was an unhurried approach at the Baby Studio. This allowed for the children to have space for growth and revisiting experiences which they connected with without having a timeline attached. We had one child who needed his nappy changed and when he was taken away from his play using transitional songs to promote his awareness of toilet change, he began crying to return to his play. Once he was brought back, he immediately took himself back to the place he was previously exploring and was smiling and throwing the reels again. Due to the room being flexible, this allowed the child to return to their play and re-engage. **Hailesland ELC***



### **Bringing it All Together**

You will find connections to **Time** in the following case studies:

A Visit to Baby Island: **Page 12**

Welcome to the Baby Zone: **Page 13**

The Office - Baby Style! **Page 13**

# PLANNING AND FLOORPLAN

## Kerry Cleland's Woolly Play Session

Artist Kerry Cleland shares her experience of exploring the 5 areas of the Reflective Guide to create a session using wool as inspiration for play.

### Things to think about:

- Age of the wee ones, and are their parents there?
- Don't crowd the room, have space between each offer
- Think about families who may struggle to engage – design an offer that is likely to work to ease them into play
- Play with the offers beforehand if you can – develop a bank of ideas for interactions during the session. Always be willing to let your ideas go if wee ones take the play in a different direction!
- Multiple offers in the space will give babies the choice of when, where and how they will engage.

### Making Connections:

Using Kerry's session plan can you link the 5 areas of the Reflective Guide to the offers on the next page?

*The play offers in the space can be set up beautifully, allowing the artist to then carry out, or support, the idea of unravelling - **breaking the beauty.***

**S** + **C**

*"It's exciting that there is something really cool set up that the babies get to explore in their own way. The artist being part of that deconstruction is a really important part of making this a "yes" space."*

**I** **S**

***Wool storage** was set up colour coded - with full knowledge this would be undone! Balls of wool giving lots of opportunity for schematic play, opportunity for undoing the organised look, making it their own. Some adults may also enjoy re-ordering the colour sorting - having a job in the space!*

*Something for the adults, such as a **friendship bracelet station**, can be really important for easing people in, who might need time and space to start feeling comfortable – having these offers within the "play zone" gives us lots of opportunities to engage them with their wee ones and transition into more exploratory play.*

**R** **I**

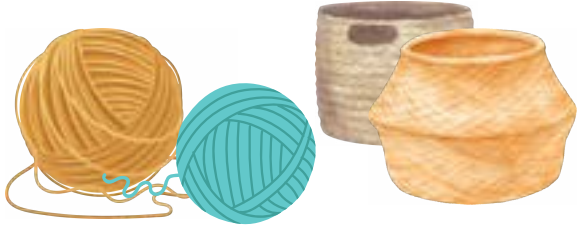
***Knitted a scaffolding net** into an irregular 1.5m square – plastic was slidey on floor so could be dragged as a mode of transport. Another offer in the space – **giant knitted squares to be unravelled.***

**S**

***Books and cosy corners** can be a great addition to a space where adults know what's expected of them.*

**C** **T**

# Balls of Wool



Obvious play offers of using them as balls and putting them in baskets

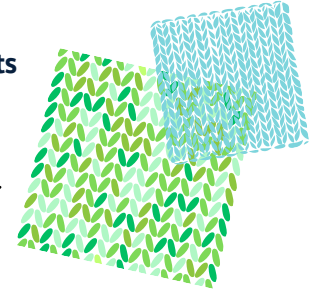
# Friendship Bracelets



Old times  
Parent to parent connection  
Help one another

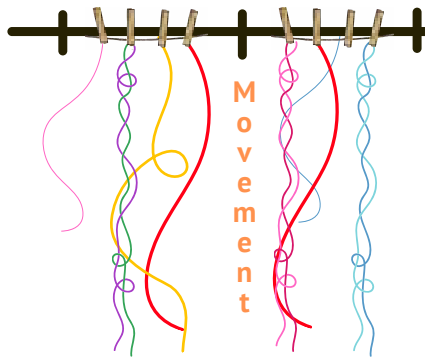
Woollen blankets

Cosy corner with books



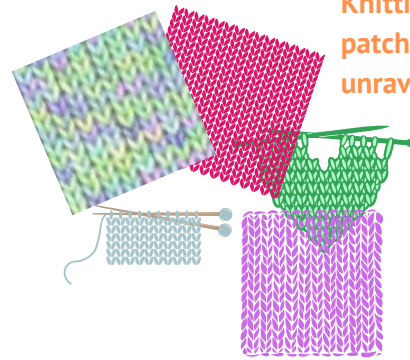
# Macramé

Plaiting example

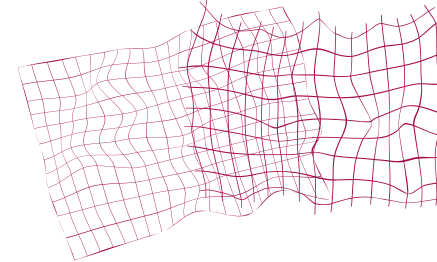


Colourful curtain can be woven

Knitting patches for unravelling



Scaffolding nets woven into huge rectangular shapes



Familiar material used differently

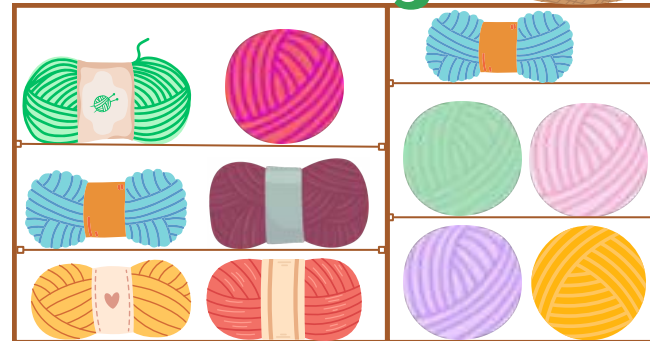


# Giant ropes

# SHAPES

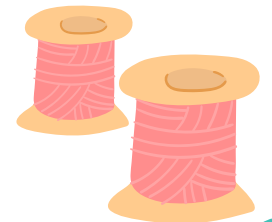


# Wool Storage



# Spinning

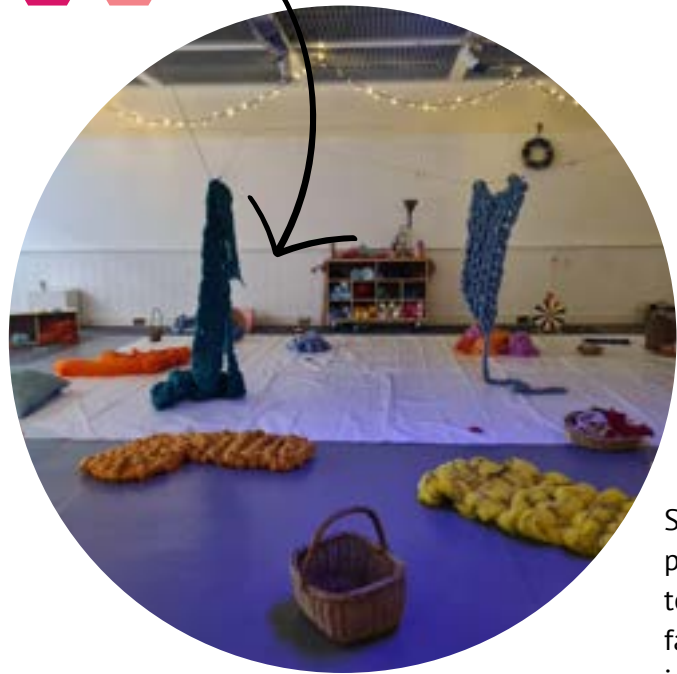
Cable reels  
Loose play offers





# THE WOOLLY PLAY SESSION IN ACTION

Big chunky bits of wool hanging down, tactile sensory offer, playful as it is, plait one of them in advance so parents have an example.



Soft places for parents and babies to lie, encourages face to face interactions, opportunities to relax and connect with other parents.



Baskets for transportation schema (and also turning into cars etc)



Baskets with different colours/sizes of balls of wool, extra baskets for sorting, schema play, spools for rolling, stacking, quite a lot for mobile babies to do.



Giant balls of wool- giving an opportunity for some more abstract play to be offered by the artist with one or more families. Can be used as a simple tool for connection, for example rolling between or bringing in big body movement, moving through the space. Kerry said, "I see this as a chance to give a more performative offer."





# LINKS TO FURTHER RESOURCES

## Starcatchers' Resources



[Engagement Signals Resource](#)



[Engagement Signals video](#)



[Creative Skills podcast: A Schematic Approach to Arts in Early Years](#)



[Schemas: A Practical Handbook](#)



[Making My Mark resource: Young Children's Rights Through the Creative Arts](#)

## External Resources



[Children's Commissioner for Children and Young People: UNCRC Child-Friendly Resources](#)



[Voice of the Infant Best Practice Guidelines and Infant Pledge](#)



[University of Strathclyde: Talking Point Posters from Look Who's Talking \(Voice 0-7\) Project](#)

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## Artist

The term artist is used throughout this document to refer to the person facilitating a participatory arts experience.

## Voice of the Baby

Refers to a wide range of communications including, but not limited to, verbal voice (semantic or otherwise), non-verbal communications like movement, expression, action, sound, gestures, and silences

## Schemas

Schemas are patterns of repeated behaviours which children engage in. They are a crucial part of development and learning.

## The Baby Studio

Starcatchers' Baby Studio is the first of its kind, a venue in the heart of Wester Hailes dedicated to local families where babies and their grown-ups can play together. Set in Westside Plaza Shopping Centre, families in the community find new worlds each week, created by Starcatchers' artists, ready to explore.

## Participatory arts

Refers to artistic experiences that are reciprocal in nature and rely on collaboration between artist and participant(s) to inform both the creative process and outcome. Participation, therefore, refers to an engagement and interaction with artist / artistic experience.

## Realising the Ambition: Being Me

Scottish Government's early years national practice guidance presenting key information about the characteristics of child development based on research and evidence.

## Rights-based approach

Refers to an approach that has the rights of the child, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), at its core. In particular, this project focuses on young children's participation rights, particularly their rights to express their views freely on all matters that affect them and have those views given due weight (Article 12), their right to freedom of expression (Article 13) and their right to rest, leisure, play, and participation in cultural life and the arts (Article 31). These rights are indivisible and interdependent.





# WITH THANKS

This resource was developed and written by Heather Armstrong, Starcatchers' Head of Early Years Development, in collaboration with Starcatchers' Artists, Summerston Childcare, Nurture Nursery, and Hailesland Early Years Centre. The accompanying films were recorded and edited by Ben Winger.

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Baby Studio photography by Brian Hartley, pages 19, 21).



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